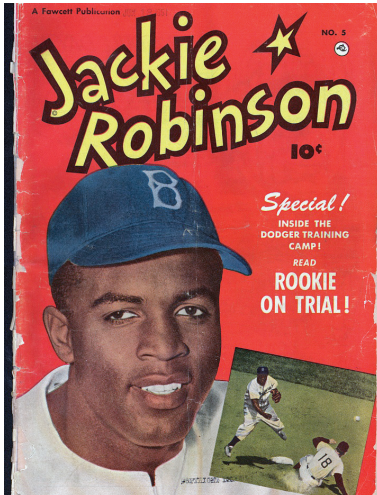


How Canada made baseball history

BY BRET SHEPPARD



Jackie Robinson made history in 1947 by breaking the colour barrier in Major League baseball – he was the first Black player to reach the Majors, playing for the Brooklyn Dodgers (now the Los Angeles Dodgers).

There is a monumental Canadian connection with this historic moment. The Brooklyn Dodgers assigned Jackie to play the 1946 season with their AAA affiliate Montreal Royals. The thinking was that Montreal citizens would be more tolerant of a Black player on the Royals as opposed to playing south of the border where Jackie would endure an endless stream of ridicule, scorn, and prejudice. Making the transition from the minors to the Dodgers would be that much more difficult.

Baseball fans in Montreal embraced Jackie throughout the 1949 season, and after the final game where the Royals clinched the pennant, Jackie Robinson was chased down the street for his autograph. A Montreal reporter quoted an observer that this was the first time he had seen a Black man being chased down a street by crowds with love in their hearts, as opposed to hate or lynching.

Jackie Robinson to this date is still held in high esteem in Montreal, up there with Maurice Richard, Jean Beliveau, Gary Carter.

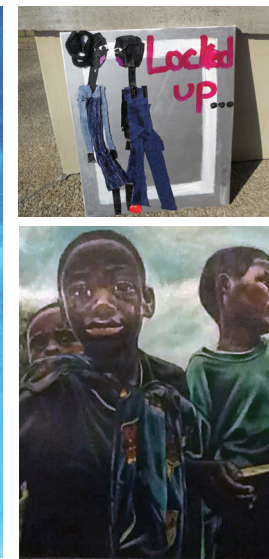
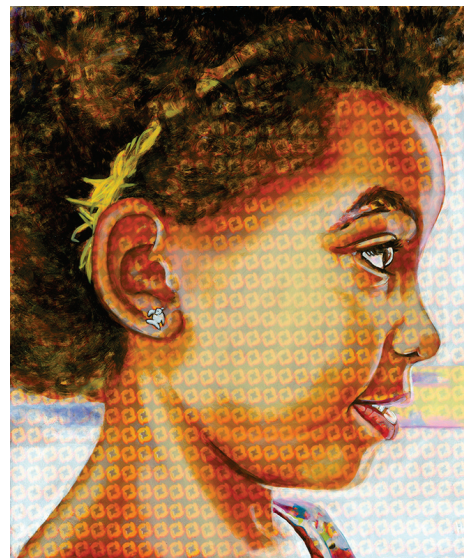
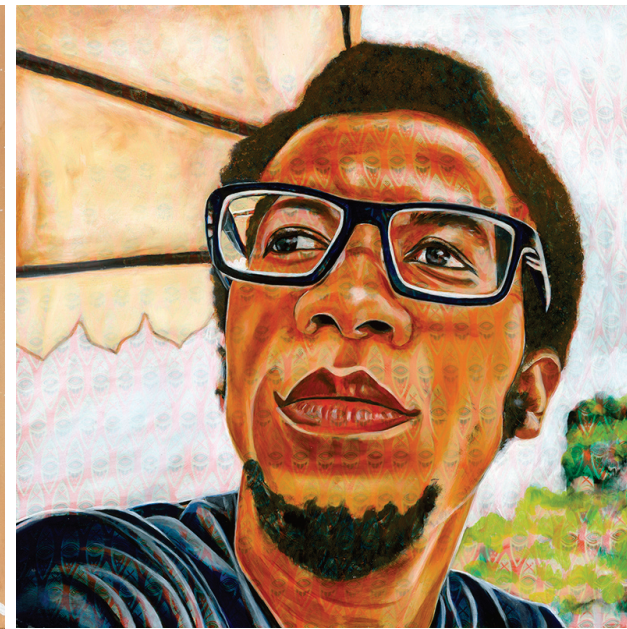
Jackie was introduced at a Montreal Expo game at Jarry Park back in 1972, shortly before he died. The ovation he received was in the category of a Richard or Lafleur. That was the impact that Jackie had on the city of Montreal though he played there for only one year. A comic book (*left*) is in the U.S. Library of Congress.

Brampton's Rose Theatre made its contribution to Black History Month with two performances of *Jackie Robinson: A Game Apart*, written and performed by one-man show Mike Wiley (*pictured left*), for students from Peel schools.

Wiley as Jackie Robinson depicted the struggles not only of Blacks, but of any minority in American society, not just then but now. And he made the one-hour production move, with students laughing and joking.

During question-and-answer sessions, he described Robinson's military service during World War II -- court-martialed for refusing to move from the White section to the back of the bus, pre-dating a major thrust of the post-war Civil Rights Movement.

Bret Sheppard is a reporter and photographer for Tough Times



Black artists at work

Black artists and Black subjects featured in an exhibition at Mississauga Central Library, to mark Black History Month and the International Decade for People of African Descent, 2015-2024.

Artists included Camille Lauren, Hans Poppe, Jacqueline Halstead, Adisa Oji. (Photos supplied)

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Where illness is bad behaviour

Some have mental illness, previously undiagnosed. Their actions in the community which indicates that they are ill is often seen as bad behaviour. In the school system when a Black youth demonstrates anger, it is often described as non-compliant or defiant, and health care practitioners do not look at the underlying causes.

If a Black youth is depressed, leading to hopelessness, withdrawal from friends and from extracurricular activities, he may be described as lazy, obnoxious and having no ambition.

Services that are helpful to the general population may not be effective for Blacks due to misunderstandings of the culture.

When a Black youth has signs and symptoms of addiction, that youth could be using medical prescriptions, abusing alcohol or other drugs. Black youths with addictions often start with marijuana. A youth with hyperactive disorder may have started smoking 'pot' because he can't sit still, listen or comprehend what he is told. Addiction af-

fects total health, cognition, behaviours, decision-making, family disengagement, homelessness, low self-esteem and feeling unloved. Addiction can lead to a life of crime.

From these examples, one can see that Black youth do not have opportunities for early intervention and treatment. There are incredible challenges in accessing our healthcare system. Existing obstacles deny many communities of colour equal access. Black youth face factors that are used to disempower them and this leads to feelings of helplessness and loss of self-efficacy. Being marginalized makes them feel isolated and misunderstood.

What can we do to support Black youth in accessing timely healthcare?

- Provide more transparent approach to planning and delivery of health care by increasing knowledge and awareness of services;
- Elevate the voices of youth in decision-making and knowing their rights;

- Build awareness that many youth have resilience and strength;
- Look for opportunities to engage them in the community;
- Strengthen the links between the Black community and healthcare providers;
- Re-vision the Child Welfare System by advocating for Black children to live at home while parents are supported. (An article about the Child Welfare System and its handling of Black children will appear in the next issue of Tough Times.)

Norma Nicholson is a nurse who worked in the Roy McMurtry Youth Centre, is a published author, a member of Peel Police Services Board, founder and executive director of Ignite4Youth, a not-for-profit organization in Mississauga, focused on helping at-risk youth. Her article is based on her workshop "Preventative Strategies to Decrease Overrepresentation of Incarcerated Black Youth: Through a Healthcare Lens."



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A battle to be allowed to fight

From 1914 to 1918, the First World War devastated Europe. Britain had declared war on Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In those days, Britain controlled Canada's foreign affairs, so Canada and the rest of the British Empire were automatically committed to fight alongside the Allies -- Britain, Serbia, Russia and France.

The war aroused patriotism in much of Canada where 33,000 men volunteered for the army.

But some of them were Black. And while war raged across France, Black men in Canada fought with the Canadian government to be allowed to fight alongside their white compatriots.

The story of this domestic battle is told by retired Regimental Sergeant Major Kevin R. Junor, a Caledon resident who served from 1980 to 2014.

BY KEVIN JUNOR | *Regimental Sergeant Major, retired*

When WW I broke out, a number of Black men wanted to fight for their country – Canada. These men came from an ancestry with a warrior spirit.

They knew and embraced their responsibility to protect family, home and country.

They stepped forward to serve but were told that they were not needed.

A Toronto regiment said Black men were not disciplined, and by the way, soldiers in the regiment wear a kilt;

But Black men continued to fight the government for the right to fight the enemy; they could have walked away, chosen to stay with their families in the safety of their homes, but the heroism began at home. The enemy wasn't a German rifle, but the prejudices of fellow Canadians.

Finally the government approved them to fight. But only a few Black men were integrated into regular forces.

In 1916, the No 2 Construction Battalion was authorized to be part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

It was a NEW all-Black unit – except the officers were white – and the first individuals approached to command the battalion rejected the offer.

Lt.-Col. Daniel Sutherland was the first Commanding Officer, and his descendants speak proudly of his pride in this position; Rev. William White, a Black Baptist minister, became chaplain.

Recruitment

There was resistance to the notion of a segregated battalion. But the message came out: (*right*)



Kevin Junor standing by the flag

**COLOURED MEN
Your King and Country
Need You
Now is time to show
you Patriotism and
Loyalty
WILL YOU HEED THE
CALL AND DO YOUR
SHARE?
NO. 2 Construction
Battalion now being
organized all over the
dominion
Summons You.
WILL YOU DO YOUR
SHARE?**

Welcome

Did I say that the soldiers of the No 2 were given uniforms but no weapons?

Did I say they were given picks, shovels and other manual construction equipment?

Their primary role was not to fight the enemy but to prepare positions for “real” soldiers to fight;

The No. 2's heroism is that they showed that men could go beyond what they are told to do, because they cared about this country.

Now we celebrate Black men of integrity, courage and devotion to family, home and country;

Resistance is in our DNA and the men of the No 2 Construction Battalion dispelled stereotypes and myths;

Today I see Black commanding officers. This is our victory.

As Black men we carry the torch of the No. 2;

It is unacceptable to give up -- to drop out of school, to say that we can't do it;

We've come this far by faith, courage and hard work.



Number two Construction Battalion stamp issued by Canada Post to mark 100 years since the Battalion start. (Photo supplied)